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YORKSHIRE INNOVATION FUND CASE STUDY:

5th Wall



Founder: Patrick Holtby
Location: York
Website: www.5thwall.co.uk
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Funded via: Yorkshire Innovation Fund
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Partner (SIP): York St John University
Website: www.yorks.ac.uk/business-development/business-development.aspx
Twitter: @YSJUBusiness

Partner (RDP): The University of Hull
Website: www2.hull.ac.uk/administration/business.aspx
Twitter: @BusinessHullUni

The Business...

Based on the edge of the North Yorkshire Moors, 5th Wall began life in 2009 as Holtby's Ltd trading as Affinity Development, a specialist management development and customer service training provider.

With a UK wide client base, founder Patrick Holtby earned a reputation for developing bespoke learning programmes to help individuals, teams and organisations interact more effectively with colleagues and customers. His engaging, drama-based courses have a proven track record in eliciting the best possible performance from the people that make an organisation.

The Need for Innovation...

In recent years, many organisations began to search for cost effective alternatives to traditional face-to-face training which usually incurred travel and overnight accommodation costs and often involved taking staff away from their workplace. Mindful of this growing demand, Patrick began to explore opportunities to make his tried-and-tested classroom based approach accessible in a virtual environment.

"I needed to respond to the way people had begun to access personal development solutions", says Patrick. "On-line learning wasn't new, but also it wasn't very interactive either. I needed to find a way of effectively translating interactive face-to-face training in a virtual environment."

The Role of the Yorkshire Innovation Fund...

With no previous experience of working with an academic institution, Patrick first met York St John University's business support team at York Business Week in the autumn of 2013.

"It wasn't until I came across the team at York St John University that I realised just how much support was available from the region's academic institutions for small businesses like mine.", Patrick explains.

In March 2014, following a successful application for a Small Innovation Project (SIP), Patrick began a working collaboration with Dr Mike O'Dea, a senior lecturer in computer science at York St John University. Drawing on Mike's technical expertise in digital learning, the pair investigated the technological logistics of converting learning from the classroom to the internet. The end result was a comprehensive blueprint for a fully interactive on-line learning tool.

In the Autumn of 2014 Patrick was awarded a Research & Development Project – a more substantial, longer-term package of innovation support. This led to a partnership with the Digital Media Team at the University of Hull, led by Dr Darren Mundy. Together with Patrick, they developed the blueprint into unique software that translated drama based learning into a truly interactive online experience.



"The Yorkshire Innovation Fund allowed access to specialists who took an innovative idea and made it into so much more."

PATRICK HOLTBY



“Both Mike and Darren’s teams brought a level of enthusiasm and open thinking which pushed my original idea to a whole new level”, says Patrick. “Working with the academic staff at both universities really stimulated creativity.”

The Impact...

With a brand new website and new, fibre-optic enabled offices in the heart of historic York, 5th Wall is poised to launch its signature learning technology in July 2015. Patrick is forecasting a significant increase in turnover and is about to appoint his first member of staff – a move he feels will help the business to focus on product development.



The Future...

Following the rebrand of the business to 5th Wall, Patrick is confident of trading internationally, especially in the United States where there is an established demand for interactive online learning.

“I’m very excited at the prospect of being able to offer both new and existing clients an alternative to traditional classroom-based learning – and its associated costs”, says Patrick.

Reflecting on his business journey over the past eighteen months, Patrick is confident his product will match the needs of tomorrow’s organisations but also sees ongoing collaboration with the two universities as vital in ensuring his online learning product continues to evolve in future.



About The Yorkshire Innovation Fund...

The Yorkshire Innovation Fund brings together ten of the region’s higher education institutions to help small and medium sized enterprises (SMEs) in the Yorkshire and Humber region to grow.

Part-financed by the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF), the fund helps small businesses to develop ideas for new products, services or processes by funding collaborative projects with the region’s universities, drawing on their expertise, specialist equipment or facilities to develop ideas which result in business growth.

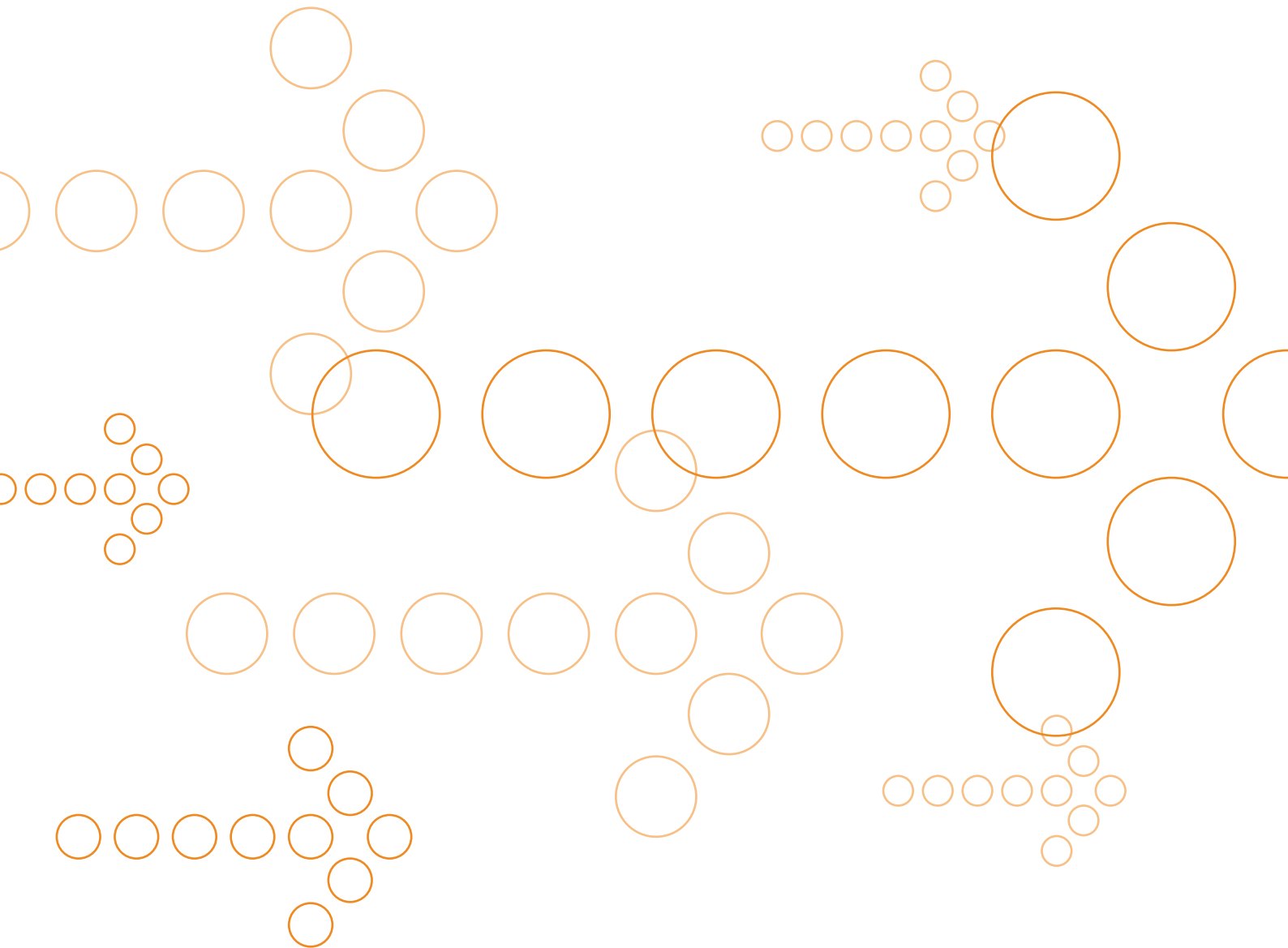
The project has attracted £3.06million of investment from the ERDF as part of Europe’s support for local economic development through the Yorkshire and Humber ERDF Programme 2007-13. Partner universities contributed a further £1.87m, bringing the total investment to £4.93m. The project team are based at the University of Bradford.

The delivery partners are: The University of Bradford, The University of Huddersfield, The University of Hull, The University of Leeds, Leeds Beckett University, Leeds College of Music, Leeds Trinity University, Sheffield Hallam University, The University of York, York St John University. The University of Sheffield is a strategic partner.

Yorkshire Innovation Fund

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